SERIOUS PHOTO STUFF

Season 1 Episode 2 February 2013

Totally
SERIOUS
PHOTO STUFF

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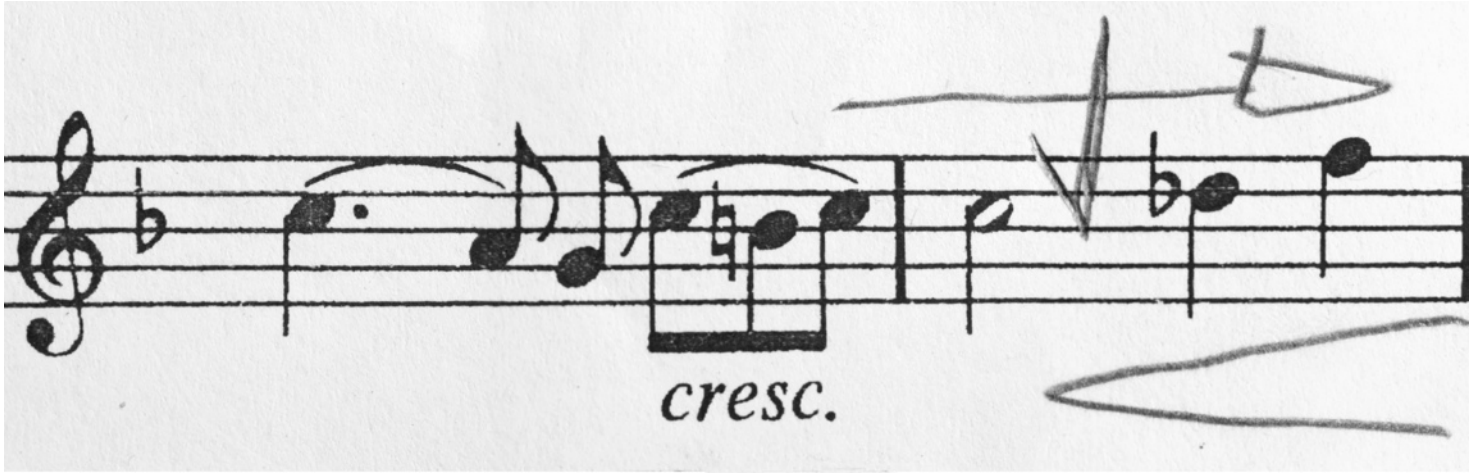
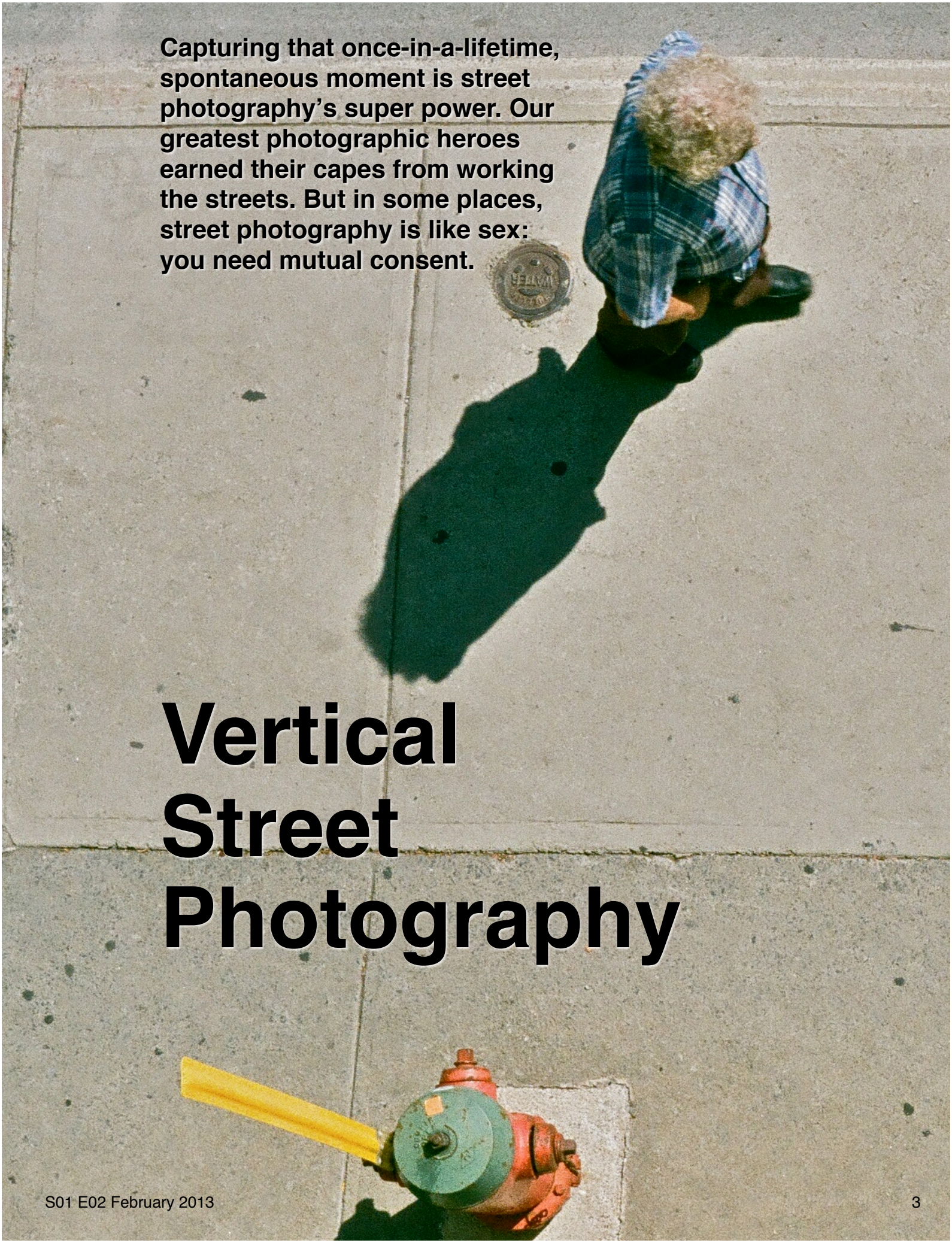
In This Episode:

Vertical Street Photography 3

More Uses for a Light Meter 8

Upcoming Events 12





Capturing that once-in-a-lifetime, spontaneous moment is street photography's super power. Our greatest photographic heroes earned their capes from working the streets. But in some places, street photography is like sex: you need mutual consent.

Vertical Street Photography

And if you can’t get mutual consent, then your photos mustn’t reveal the identities of your subjects. On the other hand, if everything is pre-arranged, it's not street photography. There's no “me”, “you”, and “?” in “spontaneity”.

The challenge: street photography without revealing the identities of your subjects while still enjoying some delicious spontaneity.

I'm guessing that street photography is the Battleship board game of photo genres. I might nail my target but I'll probably end up sinking time and money with nothing to show for it.

Not even an artistic atrocity like the Battleship movie.

My first idea was to just step out of the office at lunch time, snap away, then censor while post-processing. But I want to show what people do, not draw attention to their missing faces. I had several

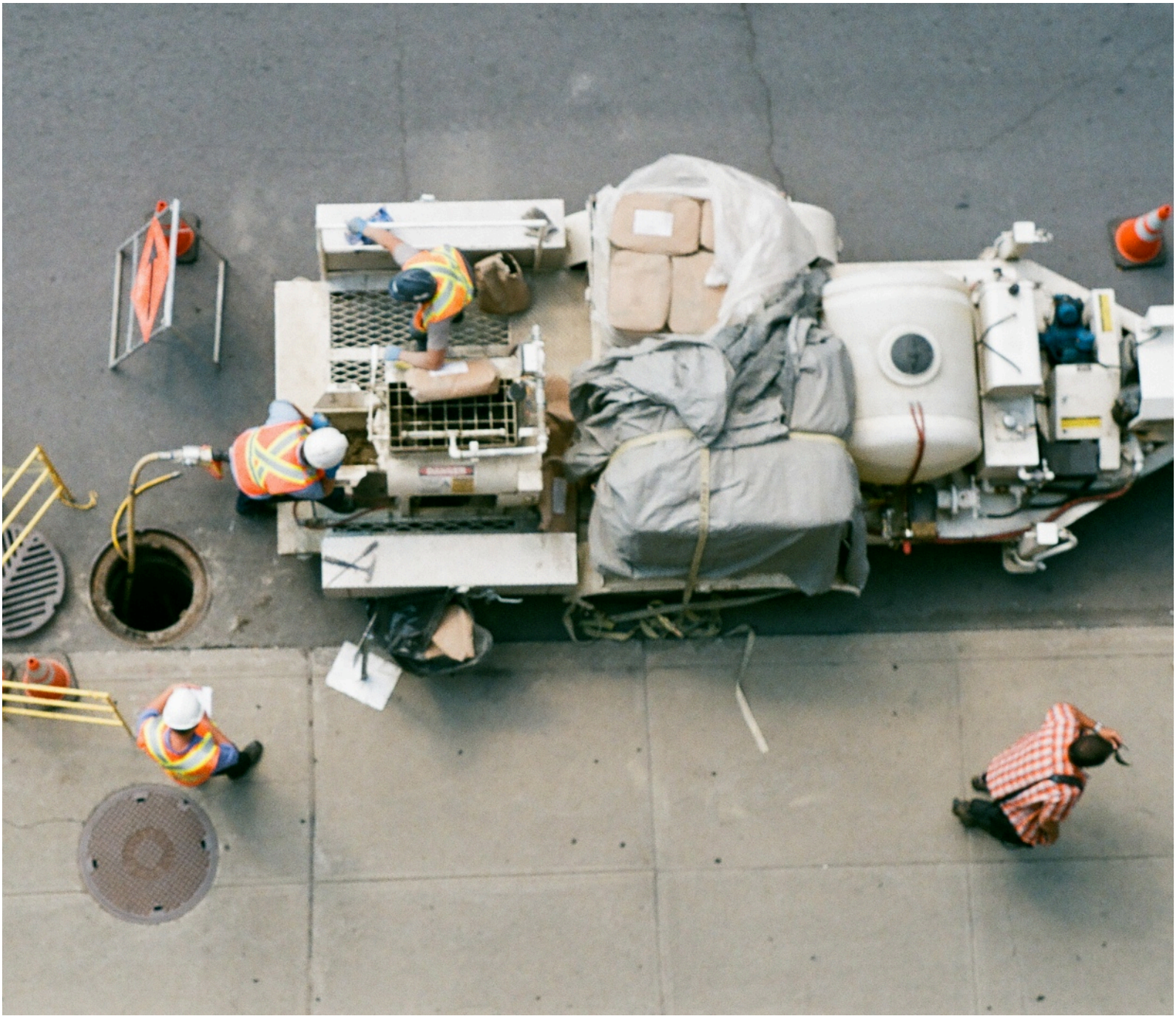
more ideas, but none were practical. Some needed too much time to prepare. One needed assistants, but they had conflicting schedules.

Two were illegal.

Then I thought of taking photos from above. You can't throw a brick in a city without hitting vertical spaces. Staircases, mezzanines, and walking stilts give inconspicuous vantages. I get to see what people are doing and I don't have to see their faces.

And they are spared from looking at mine.

On a summer day, I headed out with the Pentax K1000, 50mm lens, and a roll of Pharmaprix Easypix 200. From my high perches, my prey were oblivious to me, letting me compose ahead of time. A wide aperture/shallow depth of field is great for faces, but most people are taller than they are wide.



Unlike most people in my hometown.

So I chose a narrow aperture, at least f/11. I pre-focused on the ground, which was a mistake. I should have focused at waist level to take advantage of the entire depth of field.

Still, I'm happy with the results. My subjects were doing their things while I was enjoying myself. That's the next best thing to mutual consent. SPS

Is that a light meter in your pocket or are you happy to see me? If you have a handheld meter or a camera with an on-board meter and a manual mode, then whip it out.

More Uses for a Light Meter

1. Exposure computer.

Some cameras are so simple.

How simple are they?

Some are so simple that they have fixed aperture and shutter speed. Hipster plasti-shameras are recent examples, box cameras are unrecent ones. These cameras are tuned for a single scenario like ISO 12.5 film at the Equator, 5 minutes before and after summer solstice.

So what do you do when you discover that your last roll of film is ISO 400? Easy. Load the film anyway and use your light meter to recompute a solution before you walk out the door.

You can only play this trick if the controls for calculating aperture and shutter speed are independent from the actual light meter. The Gossen Lunasix 3, for example, is useful for this kind of thing. You’re also gold if you have another camera with a built-in meter and a manual or program mode.

OK. Yes, I know.

I know, I know.

The math is simple, even for Barbie. And you can just bring your light meter with you. But sometimes you don't want to or forget to, or you're 6 minutes away from noon in Padang.

2. Calibrate another light meter.

It's happened to us all.

If it hasn't, then I feel sad for you. Few things are more fun than the hunt.

You're at an estate sale, poking around, killing time. Suddenly, it catches your eye. It's so embarrassingly cheap that you almost feel bad for paying so little.

Like taking candy from a dead person.

Pretty metal and leather and glass. None of that plastic like those modern excuses for a camera at the downtown stores. Hell, it even

has a light meter that doesn't need batteries! How retro. How charming! What a bargain?

I mean, what a bargain!

You bring it home, yabingoogle it up and discover that the meter is selenium based. Unfortunately, selenium cells corrode over time, reducing their effectiveness. How much is that effectiveness reduced? Your light meter to the rescue!

When using your light meter to calibrate another, set up a scene where you can adjust the lighting yourself. You want to see how your new light meter compares to your reference light meter in low, medium, and highly lit scenes. Also, make sure that your reference light meter and your new meter are set to measure the same area of the scene. Most old-school onboard light meters are typically center-weighted or spot.

3. Guess exposure accurately in low light.

Modern on-board light meters are digital wonders. The titanium-marinated, subspace, artisanal multi-core processors do an amazing job at accurately guessing exposure in many situations.

Except in low light. Then they're useless. That's when I'm Chris Adams in *Magnificent Seven*, but with a light meter instead of six-shooter.

He had nicer hair.

My meter guesses accurately a full 5 stops after my DSLR's onboard meter.

4. Measuring incident light.

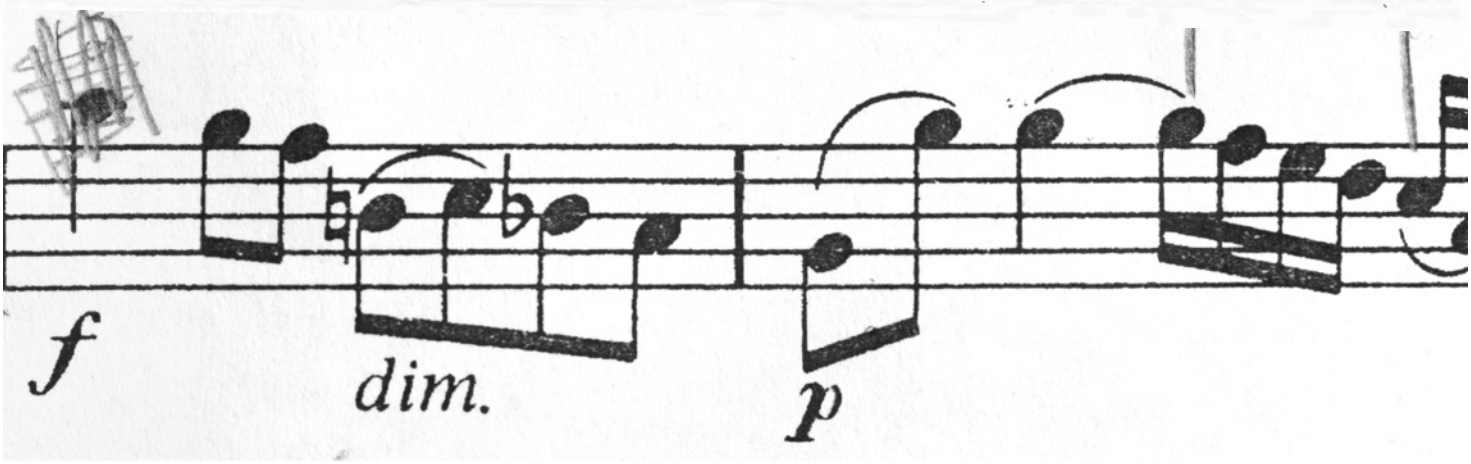
On-board light meters measure reflected light. And even your brand new camera's keanu-matrix mode can't figure out every possible

scene, which means you typically have to waste a few shots until you or Neo gets it right.

A meter that measures incident light requires a lot less second guessing, almost none really. No need to worry about backlight, contrasting foreground, or any of that stuff.

Barbie prefers correct exposures, especially of the anatomic kind.

A light meter than can measure incident light is measuring the actual light hitting your subject. That's so cool, it's ice cold. SPS



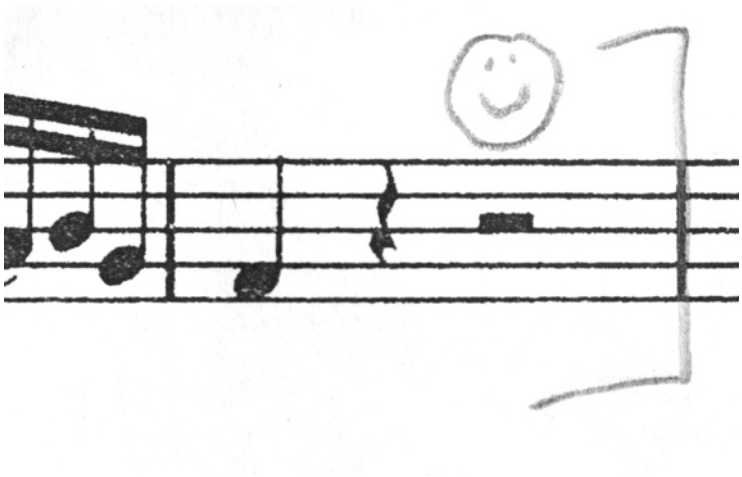
Need your fix for photo ops? First one's free.

Upcoming Events

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SEW EXPO
Denver Merchandise Mart Complex, Denver, CO, USA
February 7-9

NEW MOON
Earth
February 11

GOLDEN ARM CHAMPIONSHIP 2013
Elite Stadshotellet, Eskilstuna, Sweden
Weigh-in on February 15, competition on February 16

FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR
Winnipeg, MB, Canada
February 15-24

FULL MOON
Earth
February 24